

BYLINE: Florida Today Editorial

BODY:

Brevard sans beaches

Without renourishment, our coast, ravaged by development, will keep sliding into the sea

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What would Brevard County be without its 72 miles of beaches?

Let beach renourishment slide, and the county's half-million residents would soon find out.

And we guarantee they wouldn't like what they'd see.

For proof, talk to the 314 Brevard beachfront property owners who, after watching the wide shores south of Port Canaveral slowly disappear, sued the federal government in the early 1990s over the damage to their property.

It was the port's jetties, built by the government in the 1950s, that stopped the natural flow of sand southward down our coast.

The result was steady reduction of the shoreline, so severe in some places the beach literally disappeared.

Twelve years after the suit was filed, the owners are finally receiving settlement checks, but it's not a victory just for them.

The settlement also won millions to help rebuild our damaged beaches, which makes it a victory for everyone, including those who never set foot on the sand.

Why?

Because those beaches are the major element in making the county a \$1 billion tourist attraction and an oceanside paradise,

open to all.

Not to mention that owning property in a county bordered by the Atlantic bolsters land values and builds the local revenue base, making possible better services for Brevard residents.

A wide beach is more than a playground and a tax-base builder, however.

Come hurricane season, all that sand builds essential protection for the barrier islands.

A shoreline destroyed by storms endangers property, threatens tourism and its 26,000 local jobs, and cuts back on recreation for everyone.

Statewide, beaches bring at least \$15 billion in tourism, which should be enough to convince state and federal officials that preservation of the beaches is an economic essential.

Instead, beach renourishment funds are constantly at risk in Congress, although Rep. Dave **Weldon**, R-Melbourne, deserves credit for his consistently strong support.

Meanwhile, the state continues to give away the state's greatest natural asset to developers.

We agree with erosion experts and many residents that the only permanent solution to shoreline preservation in Florida and Brevard is:

--- A shoreline building moratorium until strict new rules are enacted.

--- New building codes that require construction to be far back from the dunes.

--- And the purchase of far more beachfront land, to ensure the public can always enjoy a natural treasure.

As the November elections near, many voters will be looking for candidates who take positions that place beach preservation ahead of rampant, heedless development.

Until those long-term solutions are reached, replacement of lost sand must continue to maintain the beaches that keep Florida's economy afloat and provide such immeasurable pleasure to all comers.

GRAPHIC: File photo; Shifting sands. An Indian Atlantic body-boarder sits on the eroded bank at the beach.